

Charity - Meditations for a Month



by Father Richard Frederick Clarke

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Definition of Charity

What is charity?

Charity is an infused virtue, by which we love God for His own sake and above all things and our neighbor as ourselves for the love of God. It is the best gift that God Himself can give, the gift compared to which all other gifts are insignificant and valueless. It is the end and aim, the perfection, and the crown of the Christian life. If we possess it, we have all things; if we possess it not, we have nothing; we are miserable and wretched and poor and blind and naked before God. Pray that God may teach you to know and to love His Divine gift.

Charity is called an infused virtue, because we can only obtain it if God shall please to pour it into our soul. No amount of practice can make it ours. No natural benevolence will develop into charity unless God adds that supernatural character that alone can render it pleasing in His sight and meritorious of eternal life. We must carefully distinguish natural from supernatural charity and we must beware of being satisfied with the former.

Charity is one of the virtues called "Christian virtues," inasmuch as their model and type is the Life of Christ upon earth, because they unite us to Christ and make us like to Him.

It is true that charity is in itself pre-eminently the Christian virtue and when Saint Paul says, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14), he refers alone to the virtue of charity with which we must be clothed if we are to be the servants and followers of our Lord. Can I say I am clothed

with charity so all around me see it? Do they not too often
detect in me a lamentable want of this virtue?

Charity, a Love of Friendship

Charity is primarily a love for God and a love of friendship, which is the highest kind of love. All true friendship implies that the love exists on both sides. Men are not friends unless each of them possesses and recognizes the love of the other. If we are really the friends of God, we shall recognize His love and find in all that happens to us a proof of His love and friendship, not complaining or wishing that He had acted otherwise, but being fully convinced that He never does anything or permits anything that is not intended for our good. Until we do this, our friendship is an imperfect one.

Friendship also requires that we declare our love to God. He knows if we have declared our love for him and the exact degree in which it is present in our hearts. However, He likes to listen to our assurance of the love we bear Him. Our love is prone to wax cold unless it finds expression in words and it is a pleasure to those who are close friends to share their mutual sentiments of friendship. God does not spare in His written Word to give us the strongest assurances of His undying love to man. Do we in return assure Him of our grateful love to Him, the best and dearest friend we have in Heaven or on earth?

Whatever words we use, they cannot surpass God's messages of love to us. He says, if a woman can forget the son of her womb, He will not forget us (Isaias 49:1). He says He loves us so dearly that He spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us (Romans 8:32), and therefore can refuse us nothing for which we ask. (John 16:23,24)

What have we to say to Him, as a counterpart of loving words like these?

Charity, a Love of Complacency

Charity is also a love distinguished by the complacency or pleasure that it takes in the welfare of whomever is its object. Let us apply this to the supernatural charity that has God for its object.

Charity takes pleasure in thinking of God's infinite perfections. It rejoices in His unapproachable majesty. The continual joy of the angels in Heaven and of the Church on earth is, Gloria in Excelsis Deo. Charity rejoices in His infinite holiness; Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth; in His Power, His Wisdom, and His Eternity.

Does my heart rejoice in the thought of God's power and glory and in my complete subjection to Him?

Charity also thinks with complacency of the homage paid to God by angels and by men.

It thinks of the honor He derives from the holiness of the saints, from the immaculate purity of His Holy Mother, from the obedience of the Son of God to His Eternal Father, and from the Sacrifice on Calvary whereby the world was made once more the Kingdom of God and filled with tens of thousands of saints. For all this, do I render thanks to God, and rejoice in the glory He derives therefrom. I thank Thee, O my God, that Thou hast on earth so many faithful servants who give glory to Thy Name.

Charity, moreover, rejoices exceedingly in the honor done to God whenever a sinner is reconciled to Him. The angels rejoice over the sinner doing penance, not so much for his own sake as because God's Kingdom is thereby enlarged and His glory increased. So, too, we ought to rejoice in the

conversion of every sinner, and all the more because we are sinners. As sinners, we can appreciate better the injury done to God by sin and the honor He receives when sin is blotted out and the sinner is reconciled to Him. Do I rejoice in the conversion of sinners and recognize that conversion has increased God's Kingdom and His glory?

Charity, a Love of Benevolence

By love of complacency, we take personal pleasure in the good of our friend, by love of benevolence we desire to see that good increased. The benevolence of charity consists in an ever-present desire that the glory of God may be promoted by all men who live upon the earth, that His Kingdom may spread, that the number of the saints may receive continual additions, and that sinners may be converted to Him. This is the chief wish of our hearts and it is ever-present in our minds - that the interests of God will be advanced everywhere.

This love of benevolence also includes a feeling of grief and sorrow whenever we hear of anything that is an insult to God's honor or that diminishes His eternal glory. All the sins of men cause pain to those in whose hearts supernatural charity is present. All sacrileges, impieties, or forgetfulness of God that they witness hurt them and cause them to suffer. Above all, they are compassionate to the sacred sufferings of Jesus and the agony of Body and mind that our sins caused Him.

Charity, moreover, requires that we shall not be satisfied with a mere feeling of good will. Our benevolence must be a practical one. We must do our part to add to God's glory. In proportion to our charity will be our devotion of every act and word and thought to the glory of God. When Saint Paul said, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God," he was but inculcating a precept of charity. What do I do to promote God's glory? Alas, how much less than I ought!

Charity, a Love of Choice

Although God chooses out of the world those on whom He sets His love and for whom He destines the rich gifts of grace and glory, yet He never forces their will. He draws them to Himself with the cords of love, but it is in their power to resist. All men choose deliberately at some period of their lives between the love of God and the love of self. Our homage to God must be a voluntary homage and our love must be a voluntary love. We must choose God in spite of the difficulties and objections that are raised by our lower nature. Have I made this choice? Moreover, do I make it in all the details of my life?

It seems logical that every sane man should choose Him who contains all perfections in an infinite degree rather than any of the miserable trifles that do not satisfy and will soon pass away.

Yet how few there are who make a full and complete choice of God! The Prophet complains (Jeremiah 2:13), "They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living water, and have digged themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water." Do I not, alas, every day choose some passing indulgence, though I know I should please God more and earn His love if I denied it to myself?

Our Lord tells His Apostles, "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." Therefore, God has chosen us rather than us Him. He chose to give us grace and carried it through to the end before we made the choice to prevent it. It was more His than ours. This is true of all vocations, great or small, when we have through God's mercy chosen Him rather than yielded to natural inclination. O my God, choose me ever and grant that I may ever choose Thee!

Charity, a Supreme Love

Charity does not exist within the soul of anyone who does not love God above all things. If some created being has the first place in our heart and God only the second, then we are the enemies, not the friends of God. He must have all our heart or none. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul." If any person or thing hinders this supreme love for God, we must avoid it at any cost. If this is impossible, we must pray earnestly that we may never fall into the terrible misfortune of loving the creature more than the Creator, who is God, blessed forever.

This, however, does not mean that we must have a stronger feeling of love for God than for some loved object upon earth. We cannot always control our feelings. We are creatures of sense, and our senses and imagination have great power over us. Nor does it mean that the love of God is to swallow up the love of created things. This is impossible. Nor, again, does it mean there must be no possible circumstances that we can imagine in which we could not promise to choose God, however violent the temptation might be. It simply means that, as I am now and under the present circumstances, I would give up anything rather than mortally offend God.

This supreme love of God includes a conviction that God is our best friend, and therefore He will never ask of us what is beyond our power. He will provide an escape from every temptation, however violent. Hence, I will have no fear about the future. God will never ask of me what He does not give me strength to perform.

The Disinterestedness of Charity

Charity is a love of God for His own sake. In its perfection, it banishes self altogether. It does not turn the mind to self or to that which self desires. It thinks only of God, His greatness, and His goodness. It seeks to promote His honor and His glory, simply for the sake of promoting the honor and glory of One so infinitely worthy of our love and homage, quite independently of any reward or gain that is to accrue to ourselves thereby.

Is this the nature of my love of God?

Yet if "charity begins at home" and we necessarily as rational beings seek what is good for ourselves, how is this disinterested love possible? It is possible because those who possess it find their highest and purest happiness in this forgetfulness of self. In their very neglect of the interests of self, they are actually procuring for themselves the greatest of all rewards — the joy that comes of loving and serving God simply and solely for His own sake.

Do those who have this charity in their hearts seek at the same time the eternal blessedness of Heaven? Some saints (like Moses and Saint Paul), in an ecstasy of love, protested that they would willingly forfeit the prospect of their own eternal happiness if by doing so they could promote the glory and honor of God. They did not mean thereby to relinquish the hope of Heaven, but that their Heaven was formed in this highest love and any happiness save this was as nothing in their eyes. The highest charity indeed includes a longing after the Beatific Vision, but this is secondary to the absorbing love of God simply for His own sake, and, as so, worthy of our love.

Charity and Self-love

If charity really promotes our highest interests and, even in its most disinterested form, ministers to our good, how is it that it is so often compared with self-love?

When we speak of self-love, we do not mean the true love of self that is identical with charity. We mean the love of our lower self. We mean the choice of some immediate good instead of the far higher and nobler good that we shall secure by sacrifice of the lower good. Self-love is the love of the child for the unwholesome sweets that it knows will produce sickness on the morrow. How often my self-love has led me to grasp at the passing enjoyment instead of the solid happiness that I should have gained by renouncing it.

Self-love does a still more mischievous work. It leads us to thrust ourselves into a position we know is a false one so we may gratify our desire for independence and for liberty. Self-love hates subjection and is thus diametrically opposed to charity, which loves to be subject. Self-love hates the lowest place or humble work and yearns after notoriety or prominence. Charity appreciates the nothingness of self and desires that God should be all in all.

Self-love, again, cannot endure any sort of reproof or correction. It rebels against those things and longs to revenge itself. It is thus no true love of self, for he who really loves himself or rather who finds his highest happiness in preferring God to self, welcomes anything that tends to lower self and to make God the exclusive object of his love. Thus, in hating self, he loves self with a true self-love and will reach charity. Is this my relation to self?

The All-Importance of Charity

"If I have not charity I am nothing."

These are the words of Holy Scripture inspired by God Himself. Unless we are united to God by the habit of supernatural charity, unless we love Him before all else for His own sake with a supreme and unselfish love, we are not children of God but aliens. Unless we do these things, we have no inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, we can earn no merit before God, and all that we do has no beauty in His sight. All our actions, however noble and generous, do not really please Him, or deserve grace in this life or glory in the next.

Moreover, unless there is at least an initial element of charity in our actions, they will not help us in any way on the road to Heaven. Acts of faith and hope, though they may be performed by one who has not perfect charity, contain an unformed and rudimentary element of charity. They are the germ or bud from which charity may afterwards spring and, in this way, they lead to charity. In themselves, faith and hope gain no merit unless they are the actions of one who already has charity in his heart.

Even if we have the habit of charity and are in a state of grace, our actions are not meritorious before God unless they are done from a motive of charity. Charity must in some way influence faith and hope, if not with a present thought of God, yet with the golden light of our love to Him lighting them up. Without this they may count for nothing, or at most merit only a natural reward. If I give money purely out of natural compassion and pity, I gain a temporal, but not an eternal reward. How careful I must be to offer to God each act of charity to men!

The Spirit of Charity

The spirit of charity is none other than the Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Ever-Blessed Trinity. He not only is the Spirit of Charity, but Charity itself. The personal love of the Eternal Father for His co-equal Son is identical with the Holy Ghost who proceeds from the Father and the Son. All these Persons are consubstantial and co-equal, united together by Infinite Love. This Infinite Love is itself one of the Divine Persons. Adore this mystery and pray for the humble faith that believes what it cannot comprehend.

It is from and through the Holy Spirit that the Charity of God is imparted to us. The Charity of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. When we receive the gift of supernatural charity, we also receive into our hearts the Holy Spirit Himself, who is actually present with us. His presence produces all the graces that flow from His seven-fold gifts. Reflect on the exceeding honor we thus enjoy and pray that you may never grieve the Holy Spirit by your want of charity.

Charity is also mentioned as the first and foremost of the fruits that the Holy Spirit causes to ripen in our hearts. "The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, goodness, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continence, and chastity." (Galatians 5:22,23) All these fruits are but the effects of charity. Charity brings joy because it unites us to God. It brings peace because it prevents our will from rebelling against His. Pray that the Holy Spirit may impart to you these fruits of His presence; above all, the charity whence the rest proceed.

Charity in Our Actions

We have seen that charity must influence all our actions if they are to be meritorious in the sight of God. However, this does not mean that the conscious motive of promoting God's glory must be present in our every thought, but we should aim for this end. The saints always had God before their eyes. Their every movement and every act, however trifling, was done with the intention to please Him. Ordinary Christians can attain this only after long years practicing a close union with God. They must begin by offering up their actions to Him from time to time and by renewing the offering as often as they can. Am I striving to do this? Am I advancing in this practice of charity?

One thing we must always remember. We must always offer our actions to God when we rise in the morning. We should make the sign of the Cross, repeat some little ejaculation consecrating the day to God. Here is an example. "O my God, I offer Thee all my actions, thoughts, words, deeds and sufferings of this day in union with those of Thy beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ." I say this little prayer intending that it will last throughout the day, even though I may forget it. I will also pray that all I do may be influenced by it.

This single offering can scarcely continue to have any controlling power over our actions unless it is renewed. Its influence fades away. We not only forget it but we also become so absorbed in our various occupations that we are in danger of ceasing to do them in any sense for God. It is necessary to renew the intention to do all for God and to renew it frequently. Do I renew my intentions at Holy Mass, when I say grace at meals, when the Angelus rings or the

clock strikes, at mid-day and in the evening, and at other times?

The Patience of Charity

"Charity is patient."

Patience consists in supporting (without murmuring or complaint), injuries, hardships, ill-treatment, whether they are deserved or undeserved. It is thus a most difficult virtue and cannot be practiced in its perfection except by those who have attained a high degree of charity. We are naturally eager to defend ourselves, resentful when accused, angry when some wrong is done us, and anxious to take revenge on our impugner. Yet, all this is forbidden by patience and is inconsistent with charity. Can I stand this test?

Every form of patience is especially difficult for some people. Active, energetic, eager natures cannot endure to be thwarted or contradicted. Even being kept waiting irritates them. For them, a careful practice of patience is necessary if they are to rise high in virtue. They must begin by suppressing the outward expressions. This will help them overcome the internal movement of impatience. They must school themselves carefully in little things with a persevering determination to conquer their natural inclination towards impatience, or they will offend continually against charity.

Patience, like all the virtues, brings its own reward. How much the impatient suffer when checked ! The inward struggle and desire to be rid of the obstacle in their path or the person who hinders and annoys them is painful to them. How they chafe under the restraint that hampers their activity! On the contrary, how full of tranquil peace is one who allows nothing to make him impatient and who takes everything as coming from God. Do I act that way?

The Kindness of Charity

"Charity is kind."

All appreciate kindness and are drawn towards those who are kind. Even natural kindness is very precious and beautiful. Kindness is one of the marks of a noble and generous character. We feel the lack of kindness most keenly when we believe others have not been kind to us. Yet, we overlook our own many acts of unkindness to others.

Should I not reproach myself for omitting many little acts of kindness that I might have done? Should I not reproach myself for sometimes being positively unkind?

Natural kindness is a sort of foundation for supernatural kindness, but the two are very distinct from each other. Natural kindness has some natural motive - our own inclinations, love for the individual to whom we are kind, or an natural benevolence. Supernatural kindness always has a supernatural motive and is directed to the glory of God. It is kindness to others for Christ's sake and for the others' sake chiefly as they are His brethren and friends, and, therefore, ours. Do I seek to supernaturalize the kindnesses I do for others to earn an eternal reward by means of them?

If we are kind to others for God's sake, He will be kind to us in our turn. Yet our kindness must not have any advantage to ourselves for its chief motive is to be the kindness of charity. We must not only have love of God in our hearts but we also must have the thought of God present to us. The kind action must be done because it is a happiness to please Him, who is in Himself so kind and good. Does my kindness stand this test?

The Contentedness of Charity

"Charity envieth not."

Envy is the vice that begrudges happiness, liberty, riches, success, or some other good to another. Envy is pained at seeing another in possession of what the envious man desires himself to have, but cannot obtain. Envy is a mean and contemptible vice. What difference can it make to us that others should succeed and be happy? If they shared our misfortunes, we would be no better off. Examine whether envy lurks in your heart.

Envy is a vice that utterly destroys the peace of him who harbors it. He is always uneasy and unites the longing for what he cannot have with a sort of hatred of those who are enjoying it. This double worm gnaws unceasingly at his heart. In our own interest, there is scarce any vice that it is such folly to harbor. Envy is also specially displeasing to God and hateful in His sight because it challenges His goodness and rebels against a state of things that He has ordained or permitted.

How different is the spirit of charity! It takes pleasure in the pleasure of others, it rejoices in their success, and is happy in seeing them happy. It wishes for nothing that others have and that is out of its own reach, for it recognizes the wise providence of God in all that happens, and therefore is perfectly satisfied with everything, and has no wish to see itself exalted and others depressed as envy does. In view of the greater successes of others, is my spirit one of envy or one of charity? Do I rejoice in them or do I feel vexed and annoyed?

The Reasonableness of Charity

"Charity does not deal perversely."

Perversity generally results from an overwhelming self-love. We all dislike children who seem to take pleasure in doing a thing just because it is opposed to the wishes or orders of those set over them. Those who are perverse may have clear motives set before them and may know that a certain course of action is their duty and in their interest; yet, they set that course of action aside for some folly of their own. In their hearts, they perceive the folly more clearly and would see it to be folly if they were not blinded by the deceptive mist of their own self-will. Is perversity an element that enters into my actions from time to time?

Opposed to perversity is docility in those who obey and reasonable conduct in those who have to act for themselves. How we love the docile! Even if we are not docile ourselves, others are dear to us if they can be easily guided. We also love reasonable men who take a common sense view of things and we renounce crotchety and misguided theories invented by unreasonable people. Even in the natural order, such men win our regard and esteem. We esteem them even more when they are influenced to it by the love of God.

Charity includes all possible reasonableness and docility. No one can ever accuse charity of eccentric action or of running counter to others unnecessarily. On the contrary, its great aim is to yield to others and to carry out their will as far as right reason will allow. Charity will give up what it thinks best to please another unless serious harm seems likely to result therefrom. Such pliability and consideration for the opinion of others is one of the marks of love of God as

opposed to the pertinacity and perversity resulting from self-will. Am I perverse or run counter to others unnecessarily?

The Lowliness of Charity

"Charity is not puffed up."

One of the great dangers of prosperity is that it so often produces a fatal exaltation of self. We are flattered by others and we begin to think that we are persons of importance.

Those around give way to us, listen to us when we speak, respect our opinion. From this, in our folly, we fancy ourselves distinguished and eminent and expect to be treated accordingly. This temper, if it exists in us, shows that we are very deficient in true charity, for charity is never puffed up with a high estimate of self.

How does charity prevent this self-conceited pride and arrogance? Humility seems to be the proper virtue by which it is to be met. Humility is indeed more obviously its opposite, but charity is equally a remedy for pride and arrogance. For charity is an emptying-out of self to give place to God alone. True charity ignores self, despises self, and is therefore quite incompatible with the temper that is nothing else than a magnifying of self and an ignoring of God. Which of the two tendencies is the stronger in my heart?

We are not likely to arrive at a true estimate of ourself unless others treat us as we deserve. How are we to know what our deserts may be? Our idea of our own deserts will be regulated by the degree of our charity. Those who esteem God the most and esteem themselves the least, consider themselves worthy only to be trampled underfoot and spat upon. How should I appreciate such treatment? Would my charity enable me to rejoice in it, as suitable indeed for one like myself?

The Self-Sacrifice of Charity

"Charity seeketh not her own."

In all the affairs of life, men may be divided into two classes. First, those whose eye is always fixed upon some advantage to themselves. Second, those who devote themselves without thought of self to the work in which they are engaged and whose object is to carry the work through, even at the cost of suffering and humiliation to themselves.

When I look at my life and the motives that guide it, do I recognize in myself the sacrifice of self that is the essence of charity?

What reveals this spirit in my life? Not zeal, for there is a zeal that is nothing but a disguised form of self-seeking. Not activity, for an active nature rejoices in being employed. Not a strong interest in the work - perhaps the pious work in which I am engaged. All these may be mere counterfeits. The real test is the willingness that the work should prosper independently of myself; a preference for its success rather than my success, even though I myself am thrust out of it; a readiness to disappear if I can do anything to help the good cause. Can I stand this first test?

Yet this is not enough. I must not be satisfied with a general willingness to obliterate myself, especially where this is perhaps impossible. If my motives are pure, I must also be ready to be taken down, humbled, misjudged, or disparaged. I must be prepared to accept all the blame of failures and to see others reap the praise of success and I must know this is done to me through God's grace. Rather, I must rejoice in this as a good sign. Can I stand this second test?

The Meekness of Charity

"Charity is not provoked to anger."

One of the strongest instincts of human nature is the instinct of self-defense. In some, it is almost irresistible. The desire to return blow for blow, within due bounds, is a reasonable and lawful impulse and is prompted by the duty we owe to ourselves.

Yet, there is no tendency more likely to lead to sin if it is indulged. There is no tendency more prone to set aside prudence, justice, and, above all, charity. Am I one of those natures ready to take up arms in my own defense at the slightest provocation?

The instinct of self-defense is always prone to mislead us due to our excessive self-love. We fancy we have been attacked when nothing of the sort is the case. We see a slight or insult when none was intended. We do not keep in mind how simple the true explanation may really be. We get angry, long for revenge, and are carried beyond all bounds by our wounded self-love. We say and do what we bitterly regret afterwards, alienating others from us and offending God by our angry words. How often, alas, I have done this!

How is this evil to be remedied? By charity and nothing else. If God were more prominent in our hearts, if we loved God more and ourselves less, if our ambition were to promote His honor and not our own, we should not indulge in these outbursts of intemperate or bitter words. Instead, we should not be easily provoked or get angry. We should take a gentle view of what has been done or we should accept the injury or unkindness done to us and offer it up for our sins in union with the supreme charity of Christ our Lord.

The Judgments of Charity

"Charity thinketh no evil."

We are all surrounded by those of whose actions we are continual witnesses and of whose character we cannot help forming an opinion from their actions. We see what they do and listen to what they say and we not only receive a certain impression from them, but also are tempted to judge them and to pronounce on their moral value. Moreover, we are too prone to judge them unfavorably rather than favorably, to ascribe to them inferior motives and see faults in them where there are none or to exaggerate whatever defects may be found in them. This unhappily is my tendency. I cannot deny it.

Why is this? It is because I am so full of faults myself that I see many faults in others. It is the reflection of myself that I find so repulsive in them. I really attribute to them the very defects that in some form or other are to be found in me. It is because of my own want of charity that I judge them so harshly. How this ought to humble me, and how careful it ought to make me in my judgment of others.

How do men judge who are imbued with the spirit of charity? They think no evil. That is, they never attribute a bad motive to any action if it is susceptible of having been actuated by a good one. If the action is in itself bad, they somehow do not seem to notice it. They are so occupied with their own shortcomings that they do not observe those of others, and where the faults of others are forced on their notice, they search for some excuse or explanation. Is this my temper? Do I thus think no evil?

The Attitude of Charity to Sin

"Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity."

Anything that offends God is necessarily a source of sorrow to the charitable, for as charity consists in loving God above all things for His own sake and is accompanied by a yearning desire to see Him honored more and more, that which detracts from His honor cannot cause charity any satisfaction. On the contrary, it pains charity that corresponds to the offense committed against God. Do I share this personal sorrow and pain when any wrong is done to His Divine Majesty or is it a matter of comparative indifference to me?

The saints would gladly have given their lives to prevent sin. It was intensely painful to them to think how continually God is offended. Many saints laid down their lives to prevent sin from being committed. The saints all devoted themselves, with generous self-sacrifice, to the furtherance of God's glory and the hindrance of sin against Him. By prayer, by active zeal, by word, by work, and by personal penance, the saints fought against iniquity. What do I do to check all the sin and vice in this wicked world?

Above all, the saints feared and dreaded any sin in themselves. They avoided with the utmost care anything that could lead to sin. No spectacle however magnificent, no honor however brilliant, no pleasure however intense, caused them anything but disgust and horror, if it was in any way mingled with iniquity. Is this true in my case? Do I relish things questionable or dangerous, or perhaps not altogether unmixed with positive sin.

The Joy of Charity

"Charity rejoiceth in the truth."

Everything that is done to promote the cause of truth is a source of sincere joy to those who have in their hearts the spirit of true charity. It matters not whether the success is due to their own efforts or those of others; they are always glad at the advance of truth, and the defeat of error. How do I testify my joy when truth prevails, when heresy is crushed, when souls are converted to God? Do I say a Te Deum or Magnificat, or thank God with all my heart on these joyful occasions?

Charity also finds pleasure in the truth being known. It has no wish to conceal anything. Those who have it in their hearts make no attempt to hide the truth concerning themselves. They are willing to be known as they really are with all their defects and imperfections. They are even glad their faults should be manifested, as far as the manifestation tends to the glory of God and the edification of their neighbor. I will examine myself to see what progress I have made in charity.

Do I rejoice in the truth being known about myself, even in matters that may humble my pride?

Do I rejoice in the truth when I find that I have misjudged or misunderstood my neighbors, and that they are very different from what I thought them to be, and far better than myself? Do I rejoice in the truth when I am shown to be wrong in some opinion, and when others set me right? Do I rejoice in the truth when I am brought face to face with my own weakness and nothingness and find that I cannot trust in myself but have to trust to God alone?

The Sufferings of Charity

"Charity beareth all things."

If anyone deserves to be exempt from suffering, it is someone who is full of the spirit of charity. Suffering is indeed necessary to expiate sin, to humble our pride, and to show us our own misery. Why should the charitable have to bear all kinds of trials simply because of their charity? Yet so it seems. Generally, the law seems to be - the more charity the more suffering. Perhaps this is why I have comparatively little to suffer.

Yet, after all, it is reasonable that the charitable should suffer when we remember that the Lord and model of all charity suffered all things simply because of His charity. What else caused His Agony in the Garden, His cruel Scourging at the Pillar, and His dereliction on the Cross? It was all the result of His Divine charity. We therefore, if we are to follow in His steps, must expect to encounter the same results as a reward for any charity if it resembles His, however remotely. If we are wise, we shall rejoice in any sign that we are to be honored by sharing our Master's lot.

These sufferings are a source of joy to all who suffer for Jesus' sake. He rejoiced to run the course of His Passion because of His longing to see those He loved delivered from bondage. For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the Cross. Thus, charity rejoices to suffer because charity knows those sufferings will obtain for it in Heaven the eternal joy of seeing others brought to God by its offering to Him of all that it holds dear. Even if I have heavy trials, can I flatter myself that my trials are a sign of a high degree of supernatural charity?

The Faith of Charity

"Charity believeth all things."

Faith is a preliminary gift of God without which charity is impossible. No one can do any work that is pleasing in His sight unless that person believes in God and is ready to accept whatever God has revealed. Works of benevolence are not works of charity if he who performs them does not possess this belief. The charity that rests on a feeble faith will always be itself feeble. He who minimizes in matters of faith will generally have a minimum of charity. Hence, pray for a loyal readiness to believe that so you may obtain an intense charity.

Charity, while it believes all things that God has revealed, is the reverse of credulous. Charity is the bitter enemy of superstition and carefully examines the claims of any doctrine or the proofs of any fact that are not already vouched for by authority. It is no act of faith or of charity to swallow down some unauthenticated statement. We should prove all things and hold fast only that which is good. The saints never were credulous or given to believe in portents, omens, or apparitions, unless bearing the mark of the finger of God.

Charity supplements faith and it strengthens it. The stronger our love of God, the stronger will be our belief in all that He has revealed. When love waxes cold, faith becomes faint. No man ever loses his faith without first willfully estranging himself from God by deliberate mortal sin. If I want a strong faith, I must cultivate a fervent charity. My ready acceptance of all that God has revealed will be in proportion to my love of Him. If I have difficulties in belief, is it because there are gaps and defects in my charity?

The Hopefulness of Charity

"Charity hopeth all things."

How common and how fatal an evil is discouragement! Half of our enterprises fail simply because we get discouraged. More than half of our faults are owing to discouragement. We lose heart, and therefore fail in the necessary perseverance. We become despondent, and seek to console ourselves by some earthly pleasure or perhaps sinful indulgence. No general who was discouraged ever won a victory and no sinner who lost heart ever became a saint or even turned to God as long as the despondency remained.

Yet it is no easy thing to keep up our courage and our hope. We so often fail, and failures are discouraging. We commit so many faults; yet, nothing saps our courage like the consciousness of having done wrong. Then too, there are continual impediments and obstacles in our way, the neglect and indifference shown by others to our work, the opposition we meet, and a thousand things more. Too often, these are causes of discouragement to all who are working for God. We ought not to be discouraged by them, for often difficulties and opposition are the best signs of coming success.

How are we to keep up courage and to be always hopeful? The only chance for us lies in our keeping God always before us and forgetting ourselves as far as possible, which depends on the degree of our charity. When self prevails, eventually hope disappears; when God is predominant, hope springs up in our heart, for "Charity hopeth all things." I shall have strong confidence and a certainty of final success if I have a fervent charity.

The Resignation of Charity

"Charity endureth all things."

The test of our love for anyone is what we are willing to endure for that person. If we love only a little, we are willing to endure only a little. If we love much, we are willing to endure much. If we love that person better than we love ourselves, we are pleased to endure for his sake that which we would otherwise dread. If we love that person better than we love ourselves, we are pleased to endure for his sake that from which we would otherwise shrink. Hence, the test of our supernatural charity is what we are willing to endure for God and whether it is a pleasure for us to endure positive suffering for Him.

We would consider it a great privilege if we were called upon to lay down our lives for the Faith. However, this is a grace we poor ordinary mortals cannot expect and we must be careful against deluding ourselves by fancy pictures of the courage we should then display. The real question before us is whether we willingly suffer the little disagreeable effects of life, bodily ailments, failures in our projects, neglect or unkindness from others, or undeserved reproaches. It is no use thinking of martyrdom until we have learnt to bear these.

If I have true charity, I shall take all with joy. Everything I have endured, I would willingly endure again for God's sake. I would, with His grace, accept even more-painful things, for charity endures all things rather than offend God. Fervent charity would endure all things rather than be unfaithful to one single inspiration that comes from Him or neglect one single grace that He desires to give us. Here is the test for me. How far can I stand it?

The Perseverance of Charity

"Charity never falleth away."

We are all anxious to persevere to the end. We know without perseverance all else is of no avail. Of what use was it to the Israelites who perished in the desert for their sins, to have escaped from Egypt, safely crossed the Red Sea, and toiled for years over the sandy plains? What use to Solomon to have been dear to God and endowed with supernatural wisdom, if, as some think, he did not persevere to the end? Therefore, all our graces are of no avail, but rather tend to our condemnation, if we in the end fall away and are lost.

Yet, who can be certain of perseverance? Who does not tremble at the thought of his own insecurity? We may have great gifts, but they will not save us; talent, activity, zeal, courage, prudence, will be useless to us. Even faith will not save us - the devils believe and tremble - and hope may degenerate into presumption, or may disappear and leave us at the last to an eternal despair.

How then are we to be safe? One thing alone never falleth away. One virtue alone will carry us unharmed through every danger. If we have in our hearts that supernatural gift of God that fears nothing so much as to offend Him, then we are safe. Faith may grow dim and all sorts of doubts may present themselves to our minds. Hope may seem to have disappeared altogether. All may look black and dark, but if we can say from our hearts that with God's help we would do or suffer anything rather than offend Him, then we have in our hearts that supernatural charity that unites us to God and ensures our entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven, "for Charity never falleth away." Do I believe from my heart that

with God's help I would do or suffer anything rather than offend Him? Do I tell Him?

The Gratitude of Charity

"We love Him because He first loved us."

Perfect charity loves God for His own sake independently of any thought of ourselves. However, perfect charity is preceded and accompanied by a charity that has at least an indirect reference to ourselves. The love of God first springs up within our hearts because of the love that He has shown to us. We think of all that He has done for us, and we recognize therein a clear proof of His love. Love begets love, and we cannot help being drawn towards One who has thus gratuitously manifested towards us a charity to which we owe all that is really precious in our lives and all the good gifts that we possess. How then can we fail to be attracted towards Him who has shown such love to us?

This love of gratitude is not the same as the love of concupiscence and not the same as the pure love of friendship. It most resembles the latter and always enters into it.

Without some sort of gratitude, friendship would be mere admiration; the personal element necessary to love would be wanting. When a Saint dwells with rapture on the Divine perfections, there is always present to his mind a remembrance of all that God has done for him. Do I, with gratitude, ever recount to myself all that God has done for me?

This element of charity is present in the charity of the saints in Heaven. Their song will not only be, "We give Thee thanks because Thou has taken to Thyself great glory and has reigned," but also "because Thou hast redeemed us to God in Thine own Blood." The song I must seek to sing in my

heart here on earth says, "Thanks to God, first for His great glory and then for His goodness and love to me."

Charity, Our Protection

"Charity shall cover a multitude of sins."

One of the characteristics of charity is that it always looks to the bright side of things. It seeks to bring out all that is good in others while concealing their sins. It does not notice their sins. It does not allude to their sins unnecessarily, whether they are committed directly against man or against God. It has a happy knack of forgetting their sins or seeming to forget them. It covers their sins from the eyes of men and even seeks to obliterate them before God by the prayers it offers for the offender. Is this my spirit? Do I not rather cover the virtues of others, and disclose their faults?

In this respect, it is especially true that we shall be treated as we treat others. "With what judgment you judge, you shall be judged," says our Lord. If we pass the severe sentence of harsh criticism onto others, our sentence will be severe. If we make little of their faults and much of their virtues, God will do the same to us. What utter folly to prepare for ourselves a harsh verdict at the tribunal of Christ by our condemnation of others.

On the other hand, Charity shall cover a multitude of sins. If we have been always men of charity, it is wonderful how God will seem to have forgotten our many sins. The poor whom we have helped will pray for us, those whom we have comforted in sorrow will say kind things in our behalf, and our charitable judgment of others will find its counterpart in God's judgment of us. Our sins will be concealed and disappear under the mantle of our charity. Is my charity such as thus to cover my sins?

The Charity of God

Among all the Divine perfections, charity is the only one with which God our Lord absolutely identifies Himself. We do not read in the Word of God that God is power, or God is wisdom, but we do read, and this not once only, that God is charity (John 4:8, 26). God therefore desires that this aspect of His Divine Nature should be continually before our minds and that we should dwell on His love for us more than on any other of His attributes.

When God appeared on earth, it was but natural that the perfection most characteristic of His Divine Nature should manifest itself most clearly through the veil of His Humanity, that among the qualities acquired by His Sacred Humanity from the Hypostatic Union, the foremost should be that with which He most completely identifies Himself. Who can study our Lord's life on earth without recognizing above all His unbounded charity and the intensity of His love for us?

We notice another phase of this love in Jesus Christ that helps us to confidence in the love of God. His charity was above all a charity to sinners. He had a sort of preference for them; they were His friends and companions. He sought them out, and His charity to them knew no bounds. From this, we clearly learn the true nature of God's charity to man. God loves sinners now, He has always loved them, and He will always love them as He loved them when he was on earth. What confidence I should derive for myself from this thought and what charity and commiseration should I derive for others!

The Charity of Jesus Christ

"The Charity of Christ surpasseth all knowledge." -
(Ephesians 3:19)

In what did the Charity of Christ consist?

(1) In an infinite self-abasement for our sakes. From the Throne of God, He humbled Himself to the form of sinful man.

(2) In a sacrifice of Himself that passes all comprehension. He gave up the infinite joy of Heaven for the sufferings of this valley of tears.

(3) In the endurance of mental and bodily agony, of desolation and dereliction.

One moment of these would have crushed the life out of the strongest of men.

Try to realize those familiar truths and see what a contrast your life is to His.

What are the chief points of contrast?

(1) Christ humbled Himself for the good of others. I seek to exalt myself at their cost.

(2) Christ gave up His life of perfect happiness that He might make others happy. I am willing to sacrifice little or nothing, my aim is to make myself happy, not others.

(3) Christ endured unspeakable agony to save men from the agony they well deserved. I complain of the least discomfort.

As to giving up my joys and pleasures for others and enduring misery for their sakes, I would not even think of it.

Yet, I consider myself a good Christian and talk glibly about treading in the footsteps of Christ. I expect to be admitted to Heaven as one of His friends and followers. What will He say to me when I present myself? Will He recognize in me any likeness to Himself or any vestige of His Divine Charity? O my God, I must be very different from what I have been if I am to present myself with confidence before Thee as one whose charity is like to the Charity of Christ.

Charity in Heaven

Some virtues will not enter into the door of the Celestial Paradise, inasmuch as they imply some sort of imperfection in the nature of him who possesses them or the circumstances among which he lives. Such are faith, hope, prudence, and so forth. However, one virtue is not only welcome in Heaven, but reigns there supreme. The very atmosphere of Heaven is nothing else than an atmosphere of charity. To the saints and angels, it is the very breath of their life. It is the light that enlightens the celestial city.

When we read that the glory of God enlightens the Heavenly Jerusalem and that the Lamb is the light thereof, Saint John is speaking of that charity with which God has identified Himself and which shone amongst men in Christ our Lord. Each saint in Heaven will shine with a radiance proportioned to his charity, and will enjoy happiness, the extent of which will be commensurate with his charity. When I shall be judged by the standard of charity shall I be found fit for Heaven at all?

Charity is moreover the Queen of Heaven, and therefore may be identified with our Lady, who, next to her Divine Son, was its earthly ideal. This is why she is the Mother of Mercy, and why we fly to her protection in all our troubles. She reigns supreme in Heaven, and her sovereignty is due to her charity. This is why she is the most powerful of all our intercessors, the most loving, the most compassionate, the most tender, and the most full of pity for sinners. To thee then, O Mother of Charity, I will fly, and will beg of thee to obtain for me from thy Divine Son more and more of His unspeakable charity.

About This EBook

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The cover image is a detail of a stained glass window of Charity by Thomas Wilmshurst, 1849; it is in the chapel of the Ashlyns School, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, England, and was apparently first installed in the Foundling Hospital in London, England. It was photographed on 23 September 2017 by Cnbrb, and was swiped from Wikimedia Commons.

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